

Helping Children Cope

Disasters can leave children feeling frightened, confused, and insecure. It is important for parents and adults to be informed and ready to help if reactions to stress occur. Children may respond to disasters by demonstrating fear, sadness, or exhibiting behavioral problems. Children's reactions are influenced by the behavior of adults. Adults should encourage children to share their thoughts and feelings about what is happening around them. Clarifying misunderstandings about risks and dangers by listening to children's concerns and answering their questions is a good place to start. Maintain a sense of calm by validating children's concerns and perceptions. Also engage in discussion of your plans for your family's safety.



Parents and adults can make disasters less traumatic for children by managing their own feelings and plans for coping. Children can detect other's fears and sadness, especially during a disaster or an emergency. Parents are almost always the best source of support for children in disasters. Involving children in the preparation of a family disaster plan is one way to create a sense of control and encourage confidence before a disaster. After a disaster, including children in the family recovery plan will give them a sense of importance. Listen to what the child is saying. When a child asks questions about the incident, answer them as simply as possible avoiding any confusion. If a child has difficulty expressing feelings, allow the child to draw a picture or tell a story of what happened. Following a disaster, children are most afraid that the event will happen again, someone close to them will be killed or injured, or that they will be separated from their family and left alone.

Monitoring Your Family's Exposure to the Media

News coverage of the disaster can cause fear, confusion and anxiety in children, especially after a large-scale disaster or terrorist incident, in which significant property damage and loss of life occurred. Repeatedly watching images of an event can cause younger children to believe the event is occurring continuously. Parents should be there for children to encourage communication and provide explanations when they are permitted to watch television or use the Internet if images or news about the disaster are being shown.



Actions Parents Can Take

- ✓ Understand that your children will have a range of reactions to disasters.
- ✓ Praise and recognize responsible behavior.
- ✓ Encourage your children to talk about their feelings and concerns.
- ✓ Calmly provide information about the disaster and plans for insuring their ongoing safety.
- ✓ Involve your children in updating your family disaster plan and disaster supplies kit.
- ✓ Involve your children by giving them specific chores to help them feel they are helping to restore family and community life.
- ✓ Spend extra time with your children.



KIDS ACTIVITY SURVIVAL KIT

You may have to leave your house during a disaster and may sleep somewhere else for a while. It's smart to put together your own Kid's Activity Survival Kit so you will have things to do and share with other kids. These can all be stored in a backpack or duffel bag. Just make sure you can carry it easily. FEMA suggests the following items for your Activity Survival Kit:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> A few of your favorite books | <input type="checkbox"/> Small people figures and play vehicles that you can use to play out what is happening during your disaster - such as ambulance, fire truck, helicopter, dump truck, police car, small boats |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crayons, pencils or marking pens and plenty of paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Favorite stuffed animal or puppet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors and glue | <input type="checkbox"/> Favorite blanket or pillow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two favorite toys such as a doll or action figure | <input type="checkbox"/> Pictures of the family and pet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One or two board games | <input type="checkbox"/> A "keep safe" box with a few treasures that make your child feel special |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A deck of cards | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A puzzle (One with lots of pieces is good - it takes a long time to do!) | |